United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

2002 Michigan Report

Our Mission

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

Our Vision

Harmony between people and the land

NRCS
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Dear Michigan Citizens:

I am pleased to present you with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Michigan, Annual Report for fiscal year 2002. We established and met several important goals; improving customer service, raising our capacity to deliver quality technical service, and strengthening conservation partnerships. We worked with landowners and others to apply conservation to Michigan's working lands as highlighted in this report. In 2003 we will continue our work of improving environmental quality by continuing to provide superior technical assistance enhanced by the portfolio of conservation programs in the 2002 Farm Bill. I look forward to working with partners and citizens to expand conservation of Michigan's working lands.

Ronald C. Williams
State Conservationist

Conservation Technical Assistance

Conservation planning and application comprises the foundation of the Natural Resources Conservation Services' (NRCS) programs and services. Technical assistance may be provided to landowners whether or not they are enrolled in a USDA conservation program. NRCS promotes planning a total resource management system. This is a sustainable approach taking into account all of the natural resources in the planning area.

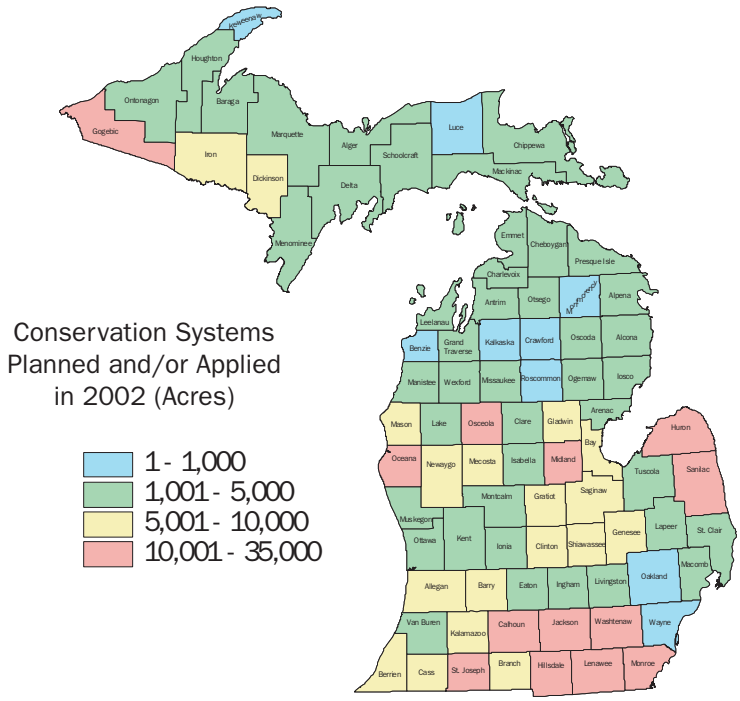
Al and Sandy Gareau, Delta County, Michigan.

Conservation Planning

Conservation planning is the cornerstone of NRCS services. A conservation plan outlines the different practices or measures that a landowner may take to protect the natural resources on the landowner's property. A plan may address only one natural resource issue, or may be comprehensive, addressing all of the natural resources on the landowner's acreage with several conservation practices.

Conservation Application

Conservation application involves the implementation of the conservation plan. This includes the actual construction of the conservation practice or practices recommended by the conservation planner and is typically done by the landowner or a contractor. The conservation application process is complete when all planned conservation practices are implemented.



Conservation on the Ground

Al and Sandy Gareau own and operate a 30 head dairy farm in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Thirty cows produce approximately 7,000 pounds of nitrogen, 4,500 pounds of phosphorous and 5,000 pounds of potassium during the course of a year.

When manure is concentrated in an open area, it is possible for nitrogen to leach into the groundwater and for phosphorous to run-off into surface waterways. Nitrogen becomes nitrate through natural biological processes in the environment. Nitrates in drinking water can cause severe health problems, especially in the elderly and children. Phosphorous is a nutrient essential to plant life. When excess phosphorous enters surface water algae growth increases and available oxygen decreases, sometimes resulting in fish kills.

The Gareaus want to protect the environment. They have a manure storage area that was built several years ago and will now add a solid manure stacking facility. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program will provide assistance to the Gareaus for construction of this facility.

Conservation Programs

While each conservation program has a specific natural resource management focus, each also shares common elements. The programs are voluntary, conservation planning and application are the decision of the landowner, and financial assistance in the form of cost-share is available. Contracts are drawn up for a specified time period during which the conservation practices are implemented and maintained. Periodic evaluations are conducted by NRCS staff to ensure the functionality of the conservation practices. Confidentiality is maintained throughout the process; the content of conservation plans are not available to the general public.

Table 1 summarizes the implementation of conservation programs in Michigan during fiscal year 2002 (October 1 - September 30).

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 - The Farm Bill - marks a new era in conservation. Over $13 billion has been commited to private land conservation over the next six years. "This Farm Bill represents the single most significant commitment of resources toward conservation on private lands in our nation's history," USDA Secretary Ann Veneman stated.

The conservation provisions of the bill, signed into law on May 13, 2002, support building sustainability. These provisions offer a voluntary opportunity for private landowners and other land stewards to obtain assistance with restoring, maintaining and enhancing natural resources.

Table 1.

2002 Conservation Program Implementation in Michigan			
Program	Total Financial Assistance	Total Contracted Acres	Total Contracts
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	$6,811,000	41,937	181
Wetlands Reserve Program	$10,000,000	4,155	36
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	$310,000	649	41
Forestry Incentives Program	$39,900	286	21
Farmland Protection Program	$2,238,600	1,624	5
Emergency Watershed Protection Program	$95,000	1600	5
PL-566, Small Watershed Program	$78,077	259	9

Conservation Programs

The Big 3

Three conservation programs authorized by the Farm Bill constitute the majority of program participation in Michigan. These three: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP); the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP); and the Farmland Protection Program (FPP); saw significant funding increases in fiscal year 2002.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

The WRP offers agricultural producers technical and financial assistance for the protection, restoration and/or enhancement of wetlands on agricultural land. Wetlands have a number of functional values including providing wildlife habitat, groundwater recharge, nutrient filtration, migratory bird resting points and recreational uses.

The WRP is popular with Michigan landowners. Since the program began in 1995, a total of 26,626 acres have been enrolled in the program and 246 easements recorded. A backlog of 170 landowner applications covering 18,493 acres currently exists. It will take $22.5 million to fund these WRP backlogged applications.

Since 1995, Michigan NRCS has invested nearly $32 million in enhancing and restoring wetlands through WRP. The average cost per easement acre was $1,100 while the average cost per acre to restore a wetland was approximately $418.

Farmland Protection Program (FPP)

The rapid increase in farmland conversion is most visible around cities and along major highways. Often, these prime development locations are also prime farmland. According to the National Resources Inventory, Michigan ranked 9th in the nation for average annual loss of prime farmland to development.

The FPP is designed to make it economically feasible for farmers to continue farming, thereby preserving prime farmland for future agricultural production. This is done by purchasing development rights for the farmland. Michigan has a strong and growing farmland protection movement. A local entity, either non-profit or governmental, must have a purchase of development rights (PDR) program in place to qualify for the 50 percent matching federal funds available through the FPP.

Since the inception of the FPP in 1996, a total of 3,726 acres from 19 parcels have been enrolled in Michigan. NRCS has provided eligible entities $5,177,800 in financial assistance.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Through EQIP, agricultural producers have an opportunity to enhance the environmental benefits of the natural resources under their stewardship. Water quality protection and soil erosion prevention are the two primary environmental benefits of implementing the conservation practices eligible for EQIP cost-share.

A total of 181 EQIP contracts were developed in Michigan during fiscal year 2002. The average contract size was 231 acres with an average of $37,624 in financial assistance provided per contract. Over 60 percent of EQIP funds were allocated for livestock management, including conservation practices such as manure storage facilities, comprehensive nutrient management plans, livestock exclusion from streams and prescribed grazing. Over 50 different types of conservation practices were implemented by landowners through EQIP.

In spite of a brief two month time period to develop contracts for over $6 million in EQIP funds in 2002, a back-log of 197 contract applications for a total of $8,022,624 currently exists.

NRCS District Conservationist Mark Kelly inspects an insect trap placed as part of an integrated pest management plan.

Conservation Programs

Soil Survey Program

The Soil Survey is one of the most comprehensive natural resource databases in the world. A partnership of federal, state and local agencies contributes both staff and funding for the soil survey effort.

Michigan has seven counties with a soil survey in progress. Over 410,921 acres were mapped in these counties during 2002. Nine counties have soil surveys completed and awaiting publication. All remaining Michigan counties have completed and published soil surveys.

Soil Digitizing

Soil digitizing is the conversion of soil survey data into a digital format for use with computer applications. After the information has been transferred into digital format a certification process ensures the quality of the data.

In Michigan, 34 county soil surveys have been digitized while 19 are in some stage of the digitizing process. Michigan digitized 15 certified soil surveys in 2002. A national goal has been set for digitizing all soil surveys by 2006.

Last Acre Ceremony

Upon completion of a county soil survey it is customary to hold a "Last Acre" ceremony. In 2002, the Last Acre ceremony for the Oscoda County Soil Survey was held in Mio, Michigan. Perhaps the most celebrated and well attended Last Acre ceremony Michigan has ever seen, the Oscoda County Last Acre ceremony featured a high school band and choir performing on the courthouse lawn. Local and state leaders, the Conservation District, soil survey staff, and various other county residents commemorated the occasion with speeches and a meal. The last ceremonial soil boring was taken from the lawn with each soil survey cooperating partner twisting the soil auger at least one time.

Grazing Lands Conservation

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides technical assistance and public information to support conservation activities on private grazing lands.

Michigan's grazing partnership, the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), has 14 member and associate member organizations. During 2002, the Michigan GLCI published a new brochure, held 19 grazing land educational presentations, and sponsored five demonstration projects.

Plant Materials Program

The Plant Materials Program conducts research to identify plant materials that can help solve natural resource problems and releases proven plants for commercial production.

Plant Materials Centers collect, test and propogate promising conservation plant materials. The Rose Lake Plant Materials Center (PMC) in East Lansing, Michigan serves Michigan, Indiana, Ohio and Wisconsin.

In 2002, the Rose Lake PMC evaluated 21 studies, initiated nine new studies, produced 12 written reports and gave 15 presentations.

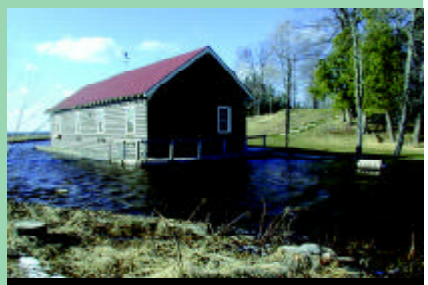
Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

The EWP Program, administered by NRCS, helps protect lives and property threatened by natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and wildfires. Technical and financial assistance is provided by NRCS to preserve life and property threatened by excessive erosion and flooding.

In April, 2002, Michigan's Western Upper Peninsula experienced severe flooding caused by rapid snow-melt. Twenty-two local communities requested EWP program assistance from the NRCS to begin immediate repair work.

Within one week $95,000 was allocated through EWP and several engineers and other technical specialists were deployed to conduct damage assessments and begin construction design. The initial repairs were completed by June, 2002.

An additional $1.3 million has been received for further restoration work with local sponsors.



April, 2002 flooding in Michigan's Western Upper Peninsula.

Partnerships

The Michigan Conservation Partnership is a dynamic relationship between the Natural Resources Conservation Service and many other federal, state, local and tribal governments as well as universities, non-profit organizations, commodity groups and others.

The 2002 Farm Bill reiterated the importance of partnerships in the conservation delivery system by emphasizing the need for technical service providers. The demand for conservation technical assistance will exceed the capacity of the current delivery system. In 2002, formulation of a technical service provider system was initiated. The technical service provider system will meet the quality criteria for conservation planning as outlined by the Michigan NRCS Field Office Technical Guide. It is expected the technical service provider process will be implemented early in 2003.

Michigan Technical Committee (MTC)

The MTC is the primary partnership body providing advice and recommendations on the conservation activities of the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Michigan. The committee is chaired by the NRCS State Conservationist and has representation from nearly 40 organizations with an interest in conservation. A number of MTC sub-groups exist to analyze individual conservation programs and make recommendations to the committee as a whole. The MTC meets monthly and sub-groups meet as needed. Information about the MTC can be found on the Michigan NRCS website at www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov.

MTC Membership *

Cherry Marketing Association
Corn Marketing Program of Michigan
Gerber Products
Inter-tribal Council of Michigan
Michgian Agricultural Stewardship Association
Michigan Agri-Business Association
Michigan Allied Poultry Industries
Michigan Association of Conservation Districts
Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners
Michigan Cattlemen's Association
Michigan Department of Agriculture
Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Michigan Farm Bureau
Michigan Grazing Land Conservation Initiative
Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems
Michigan Land Improvement Contractors Association
Michigan Nursery and Landscape Association
Michigan Pork Producers Association
Michigan Soybean Association
Michigan United Conservation Clubs
MSU Agricultural Experiment Station
MSU Extension
MSU Institute of Water Research
MSU Plant and Soil Sciences
Organic Growers of Michigan
Pheasants Forever
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Southern Michigan Farmers Cooperative
The Nature Conservancy of Michigan
Timber Industry
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Geological Survey
US Environmental Protection Agency
USDA Farm Service Agency
USDA Forest Service
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
USDA Rural Development
USDI Fish and Wildlife Service

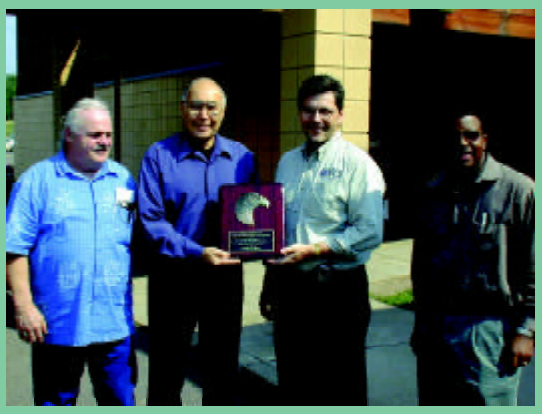
* Membership subject to change

Michigan Gains Its First Tribal Conservation District

In May, 2002, Tribal Chairman Leonard Cardinal of the Keewenaw Bay Indian Community (KBIC) and Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman signed a memorandum of understanding officially establishing the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community Conservation District.

On May 23, 2002, Chairman Leonard Cardinal and State Conservationist Ronald C. Williams of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) signed a memorandum of understanding establishing a partnership between the KBIC and NRCS to work jointly on natural resource programs.

The Keweenaw Bay Indian Community joins the distinction of being one of only 25 Tribal Conservation Districts nation-wide and the first Tribal Conservation District in Michigan.



(L-R), Tribal Conservation District Chairman Don Carlson, KBIC Tribal Chairman Leonard Cardinal, NRCS Chief Bruce Knight, and Michigan NRCS State Conservationist Ronald Williams during a tour of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community in Baraga, Michigan.

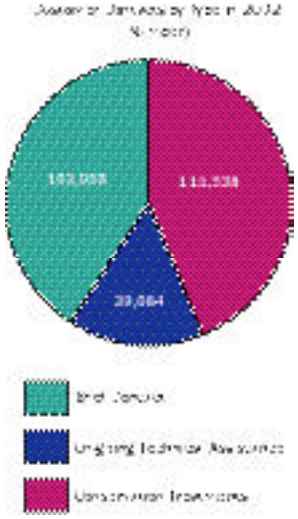
Outreach

The purpose of outreach is to ensure that NRCS programs are administered in a way that enables small or limited resource farmers to maintain and develop economic viability in farm operations; to ensure NRCS technical assistance programs and activities reach small and limited resource farmers and landowners; and to ensure that technical practices and information are relevant to the needs of these farmers and landowners.

Outreach involves heightening awareness of the availability of NRCS programs and services among people who have not used NRCS services previously. Examples of these potential customers include:

- √ American Indian tribes
- √ Urban residents
- √ Small farmers and landowners
- √ Minority farmers and landowners
- √ Limited-resource farmers

Flint, Michigan - Urban Garden Project dedication ceremony. L-R: Feddie McNeil, Agronomist, NRCS; Jay Blair, District Conservationist, NRCS; Ronald Williams, State Conservationist, NRCS; Mary Capizzo, Rural Development; Albert Jones, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, NRCS.



Michigan NRCS Outreach activities in 2002 included:

- Assisting with natural resource management in the Flint, Michigan - Urban Garden Project. This six-lot garden provides fresh produce to residents in the surrounding neighborhood. Conservation practices applied to the garden include irrigation water management, cover cropping and nutrient management.
- Partnering on a USDA 2501 Outreach project to promote successful farming efforts of minority farmers in southwest Michigan.
- Developing conservation plans with Amish farmers in southeast Michigan.
- Co-sponsoring the second annual Protectors of the Earth camp for American Indian, African American and Latino children. Thirty students from across Michigan attended the week-long camp. The students learned about natural resource conservation in a manner consistent with cultural teachings of the campers' heritage.

2002 Customer Facts

- Agricultural producers and rural residents made up the majority of NRCS customer visits.
- Federal, state, local and tribal government entities received assistance from NRCS.
- Over 150,000 NRCS customer visits were recorded in 2002.

Budget and Staffing

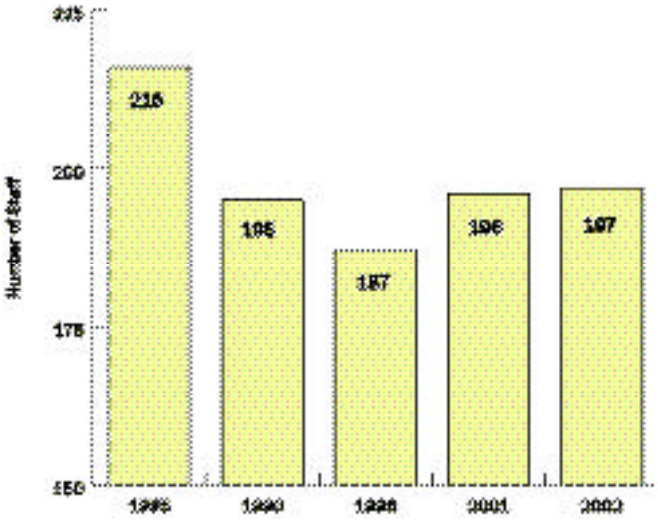
Staffing

The Michigan Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is facing the same challenge as many other government agencies and businesses across the nation, an aging workforce. Over the next 5 years, approximately 40 percent of the Michigan NRCS workforce will be eligible for retirement. With this challenge, Michigan has increased efforts to interest students in conservation careers. Seventeen college students worked as NRCS student trainees in Michigan during the summer of 2002.

The increased funding for private lands conservation has produced an even greater demand for conservation technical assistance provided by NRCS staff. While financial assistance to landowners has increased significantly, staffing has remained level. Graphs 1 and 2 demonstrate these trends.

The Earth Team is the volunteer corps of the NRCS. Any person over age 14 may volunteer with NRCS. In 2002, 407 Earth Team Volunteers provided over 11,448 hours of service to Michigan NRCS.

Graph 1 - Michigan NRCS Staffing History



Budget

The total operating budget for Michigan NRCS is divided among financial assistance (for conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP), conservation technical assistance (staff wages and operating expenses), and reimbursements (money leveraged from other sources to complete conservation work).

In 2002, Michigan NRCS administered seven financial assistance programs to customers including the:

- Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Farmland Protection Program (FPP)
- Forestry Incentives Program (FIP)
- PL-566 Small Watershed Program
- Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

Graph 2 - Michigan NRCS Budget History